



**European Commission -  
Speech**  
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**Speech of Commissioner Zaharieva at the European Parliament on  
"Perspectives on academic freedom"**

Brussels, 5 February 2025

Dear President Metsola,  
Honourable Member Ehler,  
Undersecretary of State Szeptycki,  
President Smits,  
Ladies and Gentlemen,

I am pleased to join you today for this important dialogue.

Let me start by saying how much I appreciate the role of the European Parliament in advocating for academic freedom.

I would especially like to thank the STOA Panel, under the leadership of Mr. Ehler, for creating these opportunities to explore ways to safeguard academic freedom in Europe and beyond.

Today's high-level participation reflects Europe's deep commitment to academic freedom.

Indeed, this freedom depends on some of our basic values: openness, dialogue, and evidence-based inquiry.

Yet, these values are increasingly under pressure, domestically and globally.

Openness is giving way to closed, polarised echo-chambers.

Scientific dialogue is being undermined, and researchers instrumentalised for political purposes.

Evidence is being dismissed in favour of "alternative facts."

As the birthplace of Enlightenment and the Scientific Revolution, Europe has a historical responsibility to defend academic freedom.

This is why in 2020 with the Bonn Declaration we reaffirmed our strong commitment to the freedom of scientific research.

This commitment is present in our policies and funding instruments: in Horizon Europe; in the Pact for Research and Innovation; in the work we are doing on research security, for example by protecting our institutions against foreign interference.

But while Europe remains a leader in scientific freedom, we are not immune to challenges.

The Academic Freedom Index shows a declining trend in the European Research Area since 2008.

Although we do better than many other regions, we cannot lower our guard.

Without the ability to question freely, our scientists cannot deliver the high-quality research that our innovative capacity depends on.

Without independent research, we risk losing public trust in science and the solutions it offers - from fighting climate change and pandemics, to enhancing our digital leadership.

So academic freedom is not just a fundamental right that protects our values and way of life.

It is also fundamental to our competitiveness agenda, and to our ability to retain and attract world-class talent.

My goal for the mandate ahead is clear:

To make Europe THE global leader in free and open research.

A Research and Innovation Union where knowledge knows no barriers, where ideas and researchers can flow as freely as goods, services, and capital.

To this end, I fully support the European Parliament's resolution on protecting the freedom of scientific research of January 2024.

During my confirmation hearing, I committed to propose legislation to protect and promote this freedom.

I intend to honour this promise.

In this respect, we have launched an in-depth study which will help us define the scope and direction of the initiative.

We expect results by summer.

Based on these findings, and drawing on the Parliament's valuable work, we will develop a legislative proposal as part of the new ERA Act, which I plan to propose next year.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

The ongoing work on academic freedom illustrates the potential of close and constructive collaboration between the Commission and the Parliament.

This collaborative spirit will also prove crucial in implementing and monitoring these measures.

For this purpose, we will use all the tools at our disposal, such as the ERA Forum, in order to engage researchers, universities and policymakers.

Together, we can ensure that our efforts deliver real benefits for our innovators and citizens.

And that Europe remains a steadfast beacon of academic freedom, even in turbulent times.

Thank you.

Ekaterina Zaharieva

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